

# SEAFOOD INSPECTION PROGRAM



*Seafood Inspection Services of the  
U.S. Department of Commerce*



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## **PROTECTION THROUGH INSPECTION**

The U.S. Department of Commerce Seafood Inspection Program provides a voluntary inspection program to the industry (under the authority of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946). The Seafood Inspection Program offers a variety of professional inspection services which assure compliance with all applicable food regulations. In addition, product quality evaluation, grading and certification services on a product lot basis are also available. Benefits include the ability to apply official marks, such as the U.S. Grade A, Processed Under Federal Inspection (PUFI) and lot inspection marks.

The services provided by the Seafood Inspection Program include the following:

- Establishment/Vessel Sanitation Inspection
- Process and Product Inspection and Product Grading
- Product Lot Inspection
- Laboratory Analyses
- Training
- Consultation
- Third Party Auditing

These services can be provided nationwide, in U.S. territories and (with the exception of product certification) in foreign countries. All types of establishments such as, processing plants, vessels, and retail facilities may receive these services. All edible product forms ranging from whole fish to formulated products, as well as fish meal products used for animal foods, are eligible for inspection and certification. The official government forms and certificates issued by USDC inspectors are legal documents recognized in any U.S. court.





## **Inspectors Serve Five Roles**

Services provided by USDC Seafood Inspection Program Consumer Safety Officers/Inspectors are tailored to the needs of the participant. USDC Inspection personnel generally serve in the following roles as they perform their duties:

**Sanitation advisor** – cites and oversees sanitary and hygienic practices in the facility and with food handlers

**Quality control monitor** – monitors condition and production of raw materials to final product to assure a safe, wholesome and quality end product

**Observer** – observes the overall operations of the facility and personnel practices

**Communicator** – maintains open communication with plant management to resolve problems and support production of premium products

**Official certifier** – samples and evaluates final product and certifies results

### **Benefits**

Seafood Inspection Program participants can realize many advantages which can:

**Increase** consumer confidence

**Enhance** product marketability

**Satisfy** military and other Federal, State, institutional, and retail buyers

**Develop** and improve quality systems

**Obtain** certificates which are accepted in court as evidence of fact

**Offer** opportunities to market U.S. Grade A products

**Develop** processing specifications for non-standardized seafood products

**Assure** you, the buyer, of accurately marked product (net weight, species, etc.)



## OFFICIAL MARKS

Products inspected and certified under the USDC Seafood Inspection Program which meet all requirements and criteria specified can bear one or more of the following official marks or statements associated with the program.



### **U.S. Grade A**

The U.S. Grade A mark signifies that a product meets the highest level of quality established in the applicable U.S. grade standard and has been processed under the USDC Seafood Inspection Program in a sanitarily approved facility.



### **Processed Under Federal Inspection (PUFI)**

The PUFI mark or statement signifies that the product is certified to be safe, wholesome and properly labeled, conforms to quality and other criteria in the approved specification, and has been officially inspected in a USDC sanitarily approved facility under Federal inspection.



### **Lot Inspection Mark**

The USDC Lot Inspected mark identifies products that were officially sampled and inspected to conform to an approved specification or criteria. This mark may be used on retail packages and packaging provided the label and specification are approved.



### **Retail Mark**

Participants qualify to utilize the Retail Mark by contracting for sanitation services and associated product evaluation. Use of the retail mark gives retail firms the opportunity to advertise on banners, logos, and/or menus that their facility is recognized by the USDC for proper sanitation and handling of fishery products.



### **HACCP Mark**

The HACCP mark may be used alone or in conjunction with existing grade marks to distinguish that the product was produced under the HACCP Quality Management Program. Participants receive the marketing benefits of using the HACCP mark on brochures, banners, and company labels.



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## **SERVICES**

### **Continuous Inspection Program**

This program combines traditional, continuous on-site inspection to ensure adherence of the facility to the sanitary and process requirements of Good Manufacturing Practices with finished product inspections for quality. Participants under this program must also meet FDA Seafood HACCP Regulatory Requirements.

USDC Seafood Inspection Personnel will provide continuous inspection services during all hours of operation during which certified products are produced. Coverage can be provided for a certain number of production hours per week, or multiple shifts per day. Contracts typically range anywhere from 4 to 120 hours per week (for companies operating three shifts per day.)

Program participants meeting the regulatory requirements and program requirements of the USDC Seafood Inspection Program can utilize either the nationally recognized Grade A or PUFI shield on their seafood products. Products produced under this system qualify for certificates.

### **IQA Inspection Program**

This program was a precursor to the HACCP-based Inspection Program and offered a reduced inspection frequency service for companies with a validated Quality Assurance Program.

This program is designed for seafood processors located in the U.S. which have a well designed Quality Assurance Program and qualified staff overseeing their system.

Program participants must be in compliance with all federal requirements including the FDA Seafood HACCP Regulation and have process controls in place to ensure the quality parameters are met. In addition, a Quality Assurance Program that reflects in process Sanitation controls and lot-by-lot end product quality verification program must be submitted and approved by the USDC Seafood Inspection Program. Firms are evaluated not less than weekly.

Domestic companies meeting regulatory requirements, maintaining high level sanitation standards and meeting specific quality criteria can utilize either the nationally recognized Grade A or PUFI shield on their products. Products produced under this system qualify for certificates.



## **HACCP Quality Management Program (QMP) and the Resident Auditor Method**

A new HACCP-based program that better integrates preventive control strategies to ensure seafood is safe, complies with all food regulations, and meets predetermined quality standards is now offered.

The HACCP QMP program combines the elements of internationally recognized quality standards with a HACCP-based program designed to control safety issues.

Under this new program, companies will take the next step toward more fully integrating safety and quality controls under one comprehensive plan.



In keeping with the growing international movement toward improving the consistency of quality standards, USDC's Seafood Inspection Program has further integrated quality into its HACCP-based inspection system. Under the basic HACCP QMP, the frequency of evaluation is based on compliance with program criteria. Firms may be evaluated monthly or quarterly.

It is critical for you to understand and meet your customer's quality specifications. By adopting this program, firms will benefit by increasing their documented control over quality from their supplier to their customer's door. Under the Resident Auditor Method, the resident USDC inspector becomes an integral part of the company's daily management of the HACCP QMP system.

There are five concise documents that are required:

- HACCP Plan (Safety Hazards Only)
- Defect Action Plan (other Regulatory [i.e, wholesomeness, economic integrity] and Quality Issues only)
- Program Operating Procedures [Sanitation (SSOP), Recall Procedures, etc.]
- Quality Manual
- General Program Submission Elements

## **Sanitarily Inspected Fish Establishment**

Establishments that receive contract inspection services for sanitation only are recognized as official establishments meeting Federal sanitation requirements. These establishments are awarded a certificate attesting to their sanitary compliance, and are listed in the *USDC Approved List of Establishments*. Some of the sanitation requirements include having an established sanitation control program, using proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures, meeting sanitation controls for the premises and equipment, and adhering to good manufacturing and personnel practices.



## **Lot Inspection Program**

The USDC Seafood Inspection program performs quality inspections of specified lots of seafood products.

Any company interested in having a lot of product inspected is eligible for this service. Companies can request inspections for any lot of imported or domestically produced products.

USDC Inspection personnel will conduct finished product inspections as specified by the customer. For companies wishing to limit the lot inspection to verification of buyer/seller specifications, inspections will be performed and paperwork indicating results will accompany the product.

## **Integrated Lot Inspection Program (ILIP)**

This reduced inspection service for lot inspected seafood products was developed for domestic companies with formal QA departments.

Program participants must:

- Develop and Implement an ILIP Plan
- Provide ILIP Records to USDC inspection personnel for verification
- Provide seafood product samples to USDC inspection personnel for verification.

USDC Seafood Inspection Personnel will conduct lot inspections at a reduced frequency level. These inspections are designed to verify the effectiveness of the company's ILIP plan and are designed to confirm the validity of end product test results.

## **For U.S. Exporters**

### **To the EU**

The EU HACCP QMP program is an innovative HACCP-based inspection service that fully integrates preventive control strategies to ensure that seafood is safe, complies with all food regulations, and meets predetermined quality standards.

This program is designed for domestic processors of seafood products intended for export. (Note: participation in EU HACCP QMP does not qualify products for certification marks.)

Program participants must be in compliance with all federal requirements including the FDA Seafood HACCP regulation, have process controls in place







to ensure that quality parameters are met, and be on the FDA-maintained list of plants accepted for shipments to the EU. In addition, they must ensure that their products are in compliance with all requirements of the importing country.

EU HACCP QMP Systems Audits are conducted on a preassigned frequency of every six months. Companies fulfilling EU HACCP QMP requirements can have Export Certifications issued for products covered under this program.

Our official export certificates provide you and your customers with the assurances that the product meets applicable EU and Member State government requirements and identified purchasers specifications.

Inspection and certification can ensure that the products are of consistent and desired quality, and avoid rejections which create disruptions in your distribution.

### **To Other Countries**

The USDC Seafood Inspection Program can:

- Certify to a foreign country's requirements
- Certify to your/buyer's specifications
- Provide USDC certificates for each lot of product inspected

### **For U.S. Importers**

Before you commit to your customer, we can help you write your product specifications.

In the country of origin, we can:

- Train plant personnel in sanitation practices, hazard analysis and other procedures
- Assist the plant in writing and implementing a HACCP plan
- Verify that FDA HACCP seafood requirements are met

When the product arrives in the U.S., we can:

- Inspect product and offer the USDC Lot Inspection mark for various items
- Certify that product meets your customer's quality requirements
- Provide lot-by-lot certification



## **Basic Retail Program**

This program is ideal for independent supermarkets. Our USDC Inspection personnel will conduct weekly sanitation inspections to verify your store's safety and handling practices.

This program is open to all supermarkets and is an ideal, cost effective option for independent supermarkets or small chains.

- All products your stores receive, handle and sell must be USDC inspected in processing facilities that participate in one of our approved USDC seafood inspection programs.
- Your company's SOP's detailing sanitation and seafood handling practices must be reviewed and approved.
- Your product labels must be reviewed and approved.

USDC Inspection personnel will conduct weekly sanitation inspections to verify your safety and quality practices are implemented and are effective.

- Each store under this program will receive a USDC Sanitation Certificate that can be displayed for your customers.
- The special Retail Mark may be used on advertisements and promotional literature (it may not be used on seafood products.)
- Products that have already been certified by the USDC at your supplier's plant may bear the related quality seal in your seafood case.

## **Retail HACCP for Supermarkets**

The USDC Retail HACCP Program is available to retail chains as well as individual stores. Individual stores receive the same benefits and follow the same steps except that the validation and audits will be at the individual store rather than at randomly selected stores within a chain.

Your company will benefit by participating in the Retail HACCP Program in two important ways. Your company will:

- have a system in place that standardizes your seafood handling and sanitation procedures. Standardization ensures that your employees know what to do and when to do it—resulting in consistency among your seafood departments.
- receive the marketing benefits of using the HACCP mark on brochures, banners, and company labels. This distinctive mark tells your customers that the U.S. Department of Commerce has certified your quality control program.



To facilitate development and ensure the success of your USDC Retail HACCP Program, we recommend that:

- Program personnel meet with you and your first-level management to obtain their commitment to support your efforts.
- We jointly identify a team to develop the HACCP plan(s) and coordinate implementation of the Program – we will work together as partners throughout the process.



Program personnel work with you to develop and approve your HACCP plans, get your personnel trained, review your labels and specifications. We will then validate your plan to make sure what's on paper works in practice. Details of each of these steps are contained in our manual entitled "Development, Assessment, Approval, and Continuing Compliance Evaluation of HACCP-based Inspection Systems." In brief, the particulars about each step are:

A HACCP plan is a document that describes your HACCP-based inspection system. To facilitate development of the HACCP plan, our approach is to adapt your existing forms into the plan. Use of specific USDC forms is not required.

This is a very important element to ensure success. If your HACCP planning team is unfamiliar with HACCP, we recommend our 2-1/2 day HACCP course or a similar course to learn the principles and begin to apply those principles to the HACCP plan.

Personnel accountable for proper management of the HACCP plan must be certified by USDC by passing our HACCP exam. Not all of your seafood personnel need to be USDC HACCP-certified. We can assist you in identifying your specific training and certification needs.

We will review and approve your labels and specifications covered under the plan to ensure they meet regulatory requirements and to assist you in designing your labels bearing the HACCP mark.

The number of stores to be validated is dependent upon the size of the chain. The duration of the validation is dependent upon the complexity of your plan and the proximity of one store to another.

Our systems audits are designed to capture inconsistencies and present opportunities to your management on how to improve your procedures. Each audit ends with a meeting with your management team. The audits also afford us an opportunity to acknowledge management for a job well done.



## Training Workshops

The USDC Seafood Inspection Program offers training for people involved in every aspect of seafood. We offer training from HACCP to sensory analysis; from sanitation to developing product specifications.

### HACCP Training

The USDC Seafood HACCP workshop is an intensive three-day course that covers all aspects of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point concept as it relates to seafood harvesting, processing, transporting, distributing and retailing. For over ten years we have successfully trained thousands of satisfied industry professionals. Students are taught the following:

- Introduction to the HACCP concept
- Hazard Analysis: Prerequisite Programs and Preliminary Steps
- Hazard Analysis: Theory and Application
- Control Measures
- Critical Control Point Determination
- Developing a HACCP Plan
- Critical Limits
- Monitoring Procedures
- Corrective Actions
- Verification Procedures
- Record Keeping Procedures
- Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP)
- Consumer complaints, Recall Procedures, and Label/Specifications
- FDA HACCP Regulation - Part 123

The industry HACCP workshop is also available on a custom basis to satisfy special needs such as traveling to a specific location, serving the schedule of an individual firm or providing assistance in developing a HACCP plan we can accommodate groups of up to twenty people. Workshops are available nationally or internationally in English, Spanish and French.

Completion of this workshop fulfills training requirements for the FDA Final Rule (effective December 18, 1997) as outlined in 21 CFR, Part 12.10 and NMFS Part 1, Chapter 9, Section 2, for participants in the USDC HACCP-based program.

### Seafood Splash Course for Supermarkets and Restaurants

This is a 3-day workshop specially designed for supermarket professionals, chefs and foodservice personnel providing basic information on aquacultured products, wild harvested seafood, quality, sanitation, safety, marketing, and much more!



- Seafood Quality Evaluation
- Seafood Cooking Techniques
- Merchandising and Sales
- Menu Merchandising
- Discover aquaculture, tour processing plants and the historic New England Fish Exchange
- Minimize Shrink

#### Sensory Workshops

Our experts can teach you and your personnel to identify the odor, flavor, texture, and appearance characteristics of different quality levels of seafood.

- Hands-on training with the species of your choice
- Low student - instructor ratio
- Continuing Education Units (CEUs) upon completion of the workshop

Through hands-on experience you will:

- Work with internationally calibrated sensory experts
- Learn the U.S. Government cutoff point for decomposition
- Know how to identify “premium quality”
- Learn a complete, internationally recognized language for quality
- Master the most effective smelling and tasting techniques

Through science-based instruction, learn and master:

- How to be objective
- How to handle samples
- How to get consistent sensory results

#### **Consultative Services**

- HACCP Plan Development and Validation Services
- Importer Verification Program Development
- Specifications Development

#### **Third Party Verification Audits**

Seafood Inspection Program auditors may perform third party verification audits, upon request, by interested parties with a financial interest in the auditees seafood products. The audits may be of domestic or foreign facilities, and the scope may range from the facility hygienic state, product evaluations, specific processes, or full system verifications. Audit standards may include the regulatory requirements of the competent authority, international standards, or specifications of the buyer.

Inquiries for foreign third party verifications should be directed to Dr. Kenneth E. Aadsen at [Kenneth.Aadsen@noaa.gov](mailto:Kenneth.Aadsen@noaa.gov).



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## **FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

### **Seafood Inspection Program**

1315 East-West Highway, Rm. 10874

Silver Spring, MD 20910

Phone: (301) 713-2355

Fax: (301) 713-1081      Toll Free 800-422-2750

Director (Acting) - Richard V. Cano

email: Richard.Cano@noaa.gov

Chief, Technical Services - Kenneth Aadsen

email: Kenneth.Aadsen@noaa.gov

Chief Quality Officer - Steven E. Wilson

email: Steven.Wilson@noaa.gov

Industry & Consumer Liaison - Kimberly Young

email: Kim.Young@noaa.gov

### **Technical Services**

11-15 Parker Street

Gloucester, MA 01930

Team Leader, National Training Section - Karla Ruzicka

Phone: (978) 281-9124    Fax: (978) 281-9125

Team Leader, Sensory Science Section - Terriann Reilly

Phone: (978) 281-9124    Fax: (978) 281-9125

Chief, Documentation Approval & Supply Services

George Haines

3207 Frederic Street, Suite B

P.O. Drawer 1207

Pascagoula, MS 39568-1207

Phone: (228) 762-1892    Fax: (228) 769-1436

## **For additional information about services in your area, contact the Regional Inspection Branches:**

David L. Moisan, Chief

Northeast Inspection Branch

11-15 Parker Street

Gloucester, MA 01930

Phone: (978) 281-9302

Fax: (978) 281-9134

Eric Staiger, Chief

Western Inspection Branch

7600 Sand Point Way, NE

Building 32, Room 135

Seattle, WA 98115-6349

Phone: (206) 526-4259

Fax: (206) 526-4264

Robert Buckley, Chief

Southeast Inspection Branch

9721 Executive Center Dr., N.

St. Petersburg, FL 33702

Phone: (727) 570-5383

Fax: (727) 570-5387





Seafood Inspection Program  
NOAA Fisheries  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1315 East West Highway, F/SI  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Website: [seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov)